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ABSTRACT

A counseling technique which can be used in a clinical or educational setting with middle school to older adult students to help them understand the concept of the number one priority is a component of Adlerian lifestyle assessments of individual strengths and weaknesses. It is called the stereo-balance technique and its components focus on: (1) the perception of a weakness as an overextension of a strength; (2) the need for self-adjustment in order to maintain a personality balance; (3) the identification of personal priorities; and (4) the perception of positive and negative resources. Lists of positive and negative resources, paralleled with their four prioritites, i.e., pleasing, comfort, control, and superiority, enable counselors to help clients develop their own priorities and resources. (Author/HLM)

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Clinical Application of the Personality Priorities and the Stereo Balance Technique

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Clinical Applications of the Personality Priorities
and the Stereo Balance Technique

After reviewing demonstrations of Dr. Sonstegaard, Dr. Mosak and others illustrating their technique of lifestyle assessment, a pattern often seemed to emerge when the client was requested to list three strengths and three weaknesses. The client would often, after a brief hesitation, abstract the thing that was the virtue and carry it to an extreme and state the strength as the weakness. A statement such as "I am easy going" would be followed by "I am very demanding". Such statements appeared to support the Adlerian concept that a circumstance can be its opposite. Allred (1968) presented an illustration of a client who seemed to have "uncontrollable" crying spells. The person cried, shoulders shook, and she seemed weak, yet the opposite became manifest. That is not a weakness, but rather a way of controlling and having power over other people. Even the concept of cooperation being the opposite of competition strengthens the notion that a thing can be its opposite. To illustrate: In order to play a game of chess and compete in the game, we have to cooperate and sit down at the game board together.

Frequently in a classroom setting where a basketball coach is present, the question is asked, "Would you prefer your team to be a competitive team or a cooperative team?" The coach sometimes answers "I prefer my team to be competitive." When explained that if one player puts him/her self number one, does all the shooting, all the ball handling, and is competing with the members of the team, as well as the opponent, the concept of a thing can be its opposite, and competition being the opposite of cooperation, becomes unmistakable.

Although the principle "a thing can be its opposite" is sometimes difficult to explain to a client, the Adlerian term 'compensation' is often a key to exploring the principle. At times, compensating for a weakness of being shy by keeping others involved is a technique that can help explain shyness as being

opposite of weakness and being used as power to control others. Closely related to compensation, is the resource inventory. Brown, (1976) describes a resource inventory as a way of giving recommendations, encouragement, and homework assignments to clients when using the personality priorities.

Working with middle school students, a counselor can use the concept of the number one priority as effectively as the mistaken goals of children are used in the elementary school. Experience has indicated, depending on the skill of the counselor, the goal disclosure technique is not always used with mutual respect, and middle school students state that they feel manipulated or treated in a discouraging way. The novice therapist often has conflict with goal disclosure with students 11 years or older. When a recognition response is given by the client, the novice therapist often gives a recognition response of his/her own which seems to say "I got ya" and leads to a vertical relationship.

Although research has not been completed to support the hypothesis, it appears that between the 7th and 8th grades, developmentally, students are able to grasp the concept of the number one priority, and find application with a counselor, individually or in groups. The technique can be used as a way of modifying the motivation of these students and give extreme understanding of self and others. Inasmuch as the number one priority concept is relatively new to Adlerian theory, many of the typical illustrations of confrontation, the goal disclosure technique and parables do not always apply directly. Thus the use of the number one priority seems to be overlooked as a useful, clinical tool.

It is the purpose of this writing to introduce a technique that can be used in a clinical setting with a variety of clients from middle school age to older students to help them understand the concept of the number one

priority and how a weakness may be nothing more than an overextension of a strength. The technique and premise is called the stereo-balance technique. The counselor/therapist asks the student to picture a stereo, real or imagined. The function that has the balance button is the center of focus. This balance button helps determine the direction and amount of sound that comes from the two separate speakers. If the balance button is placed too much to the left, then the stereo effect is lost, for all of the sound comes out of the left speaker, often distorting the original production and purpose. The opposite is true if the balance button is placed too much to the right. Imagine now, a person with the strength of being meditative. Such a person can meditate and think things through. As long as the button remains within reason and remains in balance, that behavior can be a resource and it stays on the plus side of the dial. It is in balance, but if the balance is tuned at an extreme, too much to the right or left, the stereo effect is lost, and the asset of being meditative may become a negative resource. A thing can become its opposite or a strength may be nothing more than an exaggeration or a compensation of a perceived weakness and instead of being observed as a meditative person, one's behavior might be scrutinized as lazy. If the dial registers negative, it will continue to do so until we coordinate the button and establish equilibrium, restoring the value of the original production.

The stereo button generalization can be used with any of the four priorities, since they all can be overextended or exaggerated to the point of being their contradiction.

Following are four resource lists that appear to be opposites which were developed by students at Pittsburg State University after they understood their number one priority. On the left hand side are the resources perceived as positive and on the right hand side are the resources that were the opposite.

As one looks at these lists, it is important to remember two basic concepts of Adlerian psychology. First of all, no two people are alike, therefore, no one will match the lists exactly, for everyone still has their creative self. Secondly, within the four priorities, no one is a pure priority. We all like to feel that we are: pleasing to others, comfortable, in control of situations and/or things, superior in some areas, and recognized as being right, best, or first.

Since no two people are alike, it can become confusing finding the extreme of a resource. One approach is to ask: "What happens when you are people oriented?"

"I have a lot of friends."

"What happens with all these friends, and how do they treat you?"

"They expect a lot from me."

"You get overextended and are a little out of balance on the stereo, so you allow people to use or manipulate you."

From the other direction one might ask: "What happens when you get manipulated and pulled in different directions?"

"People expect a lot of me."

"You have quite a few friends who depend on you?"

"Yes, there is someone always calling me, or "I'm calling them."

"You are quite people oriented, but may want to balance the purpose behind your having so many friends to please."

Resources Paralleled With
Pleasing Priority

Positive Resources	Opposite Resources
1. people-oriented	tries to get too close to people--fragmented
2. persuasive	manipulative
3. temperamental	self-centered
4. theatrical - dramatic	farcical
5. sentimental	"mushy"
6. artistic	preoccupation with inner experience
7. introspective	self-rejecting
8. emotional	overlooking important facts

Resources Paralleled With
Comfort Priority

Positive Resources	Opposite Resources
1. meditative	lazy - low productivity
2. dreams of the future	non-caring for the here and now
3. grasps concepts quickly	lacks reality testing
4. creative	fantasy oriented
5. inventive	unrealistic
6. imaginative	exaggerates
7. committed to causes	scapegoat
8. likes abstract thinking	off-in-the-clouds

Resources Paralleled With
Control Priority

Positive Resources	Opposite Resources
1. conservative	uptight
2. even tempered	lacks spontaneity
3. organized	over-programmed
4. systematic/structured	(won't) can't vary approach
5. objective, fact-oriented	lacks warmth
6. pondering	procrastinating
7. logical	inflexible
8. precise	compulsive
9. examines all possible alternatives before deciding	indecisive
10. analytical	over-serious

Resources Paralleled With
Superiority Priority

Positive Resources	Opposite Resources
1. action-oriented	doesn't plan
2. enjoys active involvement	cannot relax-must participate in everything--overworked
3. practical	doesn't look at long-range objectives
4. brisk-moving	lacks patience
5. proud	self-centered
6. driving	impatient
7. impatient with wordy people	abusive - discourteous
8. gets things started	bossy
9. unreserved	aggressive
10. enthusiastic	domineering

As students/clients begin with their counselor/therapist to develop their resource inventory and select the positive resources associated with their number one priority, it seems easy for the counselor or therapist to encourage the student/client to attend the behaviors they associate as strengths, as achievements, and strong points and it seems that they are the easiest to spotlight and focus upon. It becomes more difficult to find the opposite because we do not like to look at our weaknesses. However, in working in a clinical setting with families, couples, groups, or individual cases it is that knowledge of the opposite resource that the client finds to be more valuable to him because they are out of his awareness. They are like clothes stored in the attic--forgotten until they are needed or focused upon. Sometimes clients do not want to focus on the opposite resources, and using the stereo balance technique helps to identify the person's number one priority and carry his positive resource to the extreme. Clients find that this way of becoming aware of their resources is what leads to change. It is at this time that the recognition reflex is seen and the student/client is able to realize and then harness much of his/her potential, and with encouragement, find greater fulfillment.

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